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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY CUMBER'S ISTANBUL VISIT WITH OIC SYG

REF: ANKARA 1113

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11. (SBU) Summary: Presidential Special Envoy Cumber underscored the need for OIC and USG interaction and cooperation prior to international gatherings during his August 22 meetings in Istanbul with OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu and members of the Turkish media. During their meeting at the OIC office, S/E Cumber and SYG Ihsanoglu discussed projects to enhance the status of women, the recognition of Kosovo, coordinating efforts for the upcoming Religious Defamation Convention, improving media relations, and combating extremism. At lunch with prominent members of the Turkish media, S/E Cumber and SYG Ihsanoglu discussed the USG's relationship with the Muslim world and positive developments with regard to the Department of Homeland Security's processing of applicants for permanent residency.

Meeting with OIC Secretary General Ihsanoglu

12. (SBU) Meeting for the fourth time with OIC Secretary General Ihsanoglu and his advisor Ufuk Gokcen, S/E Cumber discussed the broader relationship between the USG and OIC. SYG Ihsanoglu agreed with the overall objective of USG cooperative efforts with the OIC to enhance the status of women, but felt that the health initiative would require pilot projects and asked how the US and OIC would provide assistance. Instead of implementing a project in five to ten countries, he suggested the project begin in one or two countries and then expand to additional countries. S/E Cumber suggested distributing malaria nets through the OIC, and both agreed to move the enhancement of the status of women to the top of a long list of objectives.

13. (SBU) S/E Cumber said that Kosovo recognition remained at the forefront of his agenda, and requested that SYG Ihsanoglu take up this cause within the OIC. In light of the recent situation with Georgia and South Ossetia, SYG Ihsanoglu stressed that OIC recognition of Kosovo would be even more difficult. The Egyptians are concerned that the recognition of Kosovo will create a legal precedent with which they would prefer not to be associated for fear of a domino effect. S/E Cumber said that because of the Georgian situation, he sees a greater need for SYG Ihsanoglu's leadership, especially in convincing Saudi Arabia to make a positive statement. SYG Ihsanoglu recognizes the need and supports the idea, but sees significant challenges in the process. Both agreed that S/E

Cumber should suggest that Secretary Rice include OIC recognition of Kosovo on her agenda for the UN General Assembly in September.

14. (SBU) Turning to the OIC's upcoming meeting about the European Human Rights Commission's resolution on the Defamation of Religion in Geneva, S/E Cumber suggested that the USG and OIC develop a process for sharing position papers prior to meeting about the topic. SYG Ihsanoglu confirmed that reaching an understanding would be helpful and explained that he wants a unanimous agreement in Geneva that includes mention of other religions. S/E Cumber suggested such an agreement might be possible if, prior to the meeting in the first week of September the OIC and DRL engage in a dialogue in which "they are not in a room where they are on opposite sides." SYG Ihsanoglu agreed this would be helpful, and requested that the details of such a meeting be clarified as soon as possible. He defined defamation as the denigration of values and symbols of religion, pointing to the caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed published in a Danish newspaper, as well as the desecration of Muslim tombs in Europe. All of these occurrences reminded him of anti-Semitism in the 1930s.

15. (SBU) SYG Ihsanoglu stressed the need for an enhanced focus on media ethics and means of successfully mitigating the impact of "islamophobic" individuals such as Dutch MP Wilders. S/E Cumber concurred, commenting on the U.S. Muslim community's poor job of developing positive public relations in the United States and the need for intrafaith dialogue to unify the voice of the 1.5 billion Muslims in the world. He further suggested that the OIC should redirect its resources to develop a campaign of unified responsiveness that will have an impact at the grassroots level.

16. (SBU) SYG Ihsanoglu appreciated and supported S/E Cumber's
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recommendations in preparation for the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly in New York: expedited clearance for the members of the OIC delegation; a meeting with SYG Ihsanoglu and Secretary Rice in New York, followed by an Iftar dinner hosted by Secretary Rice for all Foreign Ministers and Ambassadors; and a visit by SYG Ihsanoglu with President Bush in the White House to speak to America.

17. (SBU) Both S/E Cumber and SYG Ihsanoglu highlighted the need to work out issues with Pakistan and Egypt as the two countries continue to communicate as if the OIC were a bloc of states rather than an organization. In this vein, S/E Cumber presented the need to combat Wahabism and extremism, pointing to what he termed a "disturbing" rightward shift among Muslim countries. He noted that "pluralistic Muslim societies are getting marginalized by a narrow band of isolationism and Wahabism" in the practice of Islam. In agreement, SYG Ihsanoglu regretted that there is no longer a competing ideology like communism, leaving religion to "become the opium for young people now."

18. (SBU) SYG Ihsanoglu strongly praised S/E Cumber's work over the past five months and emphasized while speaking to the control officer the OIC's desire for him to continue after the USG change of administration.

Lunch with the SYG Ihsanoglu and Newspaper Editors

19. (U) The office of the OIC offered S/E Cumber an opportunity to speak with the editors-in-chief of NTV News Mete Cubukcu; Milliyet Foreign News Editor in Chief Kadri Gursel; and the director general of Cihan News Agency Abdulhamit Bilici during an intimate lunch with SYG Ihsanoglu. S/E Cumber addressed many of the topics earlier discussed with SYG Ihsanoglu, including the Muslim community's need to engage in intrafaith dialogue and improve public relations with the rest of the world.

¶10. (U) S/E Cumber also took this opportunity to introduce the work of DHS and the Office of the Special Envoy to the OIC to combat prejudices in the United States. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff visited several domestic airports with high international traffic to distribute information on interaction with the traveling public. Additionally, Cumber explained in three to four months, DHS will send permanent resident cards (green cards) to those applicants with Muslim names who have waited for at times up to four years. According to Cumber, DHS intends to issue a green card if it receives no response from other agencies before a thirty day window of opportunity has lapsed. This significantly reduces waiting times for Muslims who otherwise might wait several years.

¶11. (U) After SYG Ihsanoglu provided a brief overview of the history of the OIC's relations with the USG, Bilici asked why the USG waited until June 2007 to become involved with the OIC, suggesting that the events on September 11, or Russia's appointment of an observer to the OIC might have prompted U.S. action. S/E Cumber and SYG Ihsanoglu explained that the United States has always included Islam in its worldview, pointing to President Eisenhower's 1957 speech during the opening of the U.S. Islamic Center. The OIC is now of more value to countries like the United States, SYG Ihsanoglu noted, as it had previously not taken an active role in international governmental organizations.

¶12. (U) Throughout his meetings, S/E Cumber emphasized the need for intrafaith dialogue among Muslims. "We have yet to get to the point where we can live together," he said, making it difficult to engage in interfaith dialogue.

¶13. (U) This message has been cleared by S/E Sada Cumber.
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